

“Everyday Carry”

By:

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While cruising around the internet, I came across the below social media message sent by Neal Shea at *National Geographic* attached to a martial arts website, dealing with life of the Mursi people who live in the area between Ethiopia and northern Kenya. Being a longtime Ohioan, I’m always fascinated by the way people live on the other side of the world and their perspectives. Reading the post in detail, it reminds of the isolation bubble in which we live in this country. From the speaker’s perspective, the presence of rifles doesn’t just make a difference in keeping his village safe, it is his “edge” in life -- it sets him apart in that it makes both enemies and allies “think twice” before dealing with him. At the same time, it is literally the difference between being predator and prey when dealing with the wildlife.

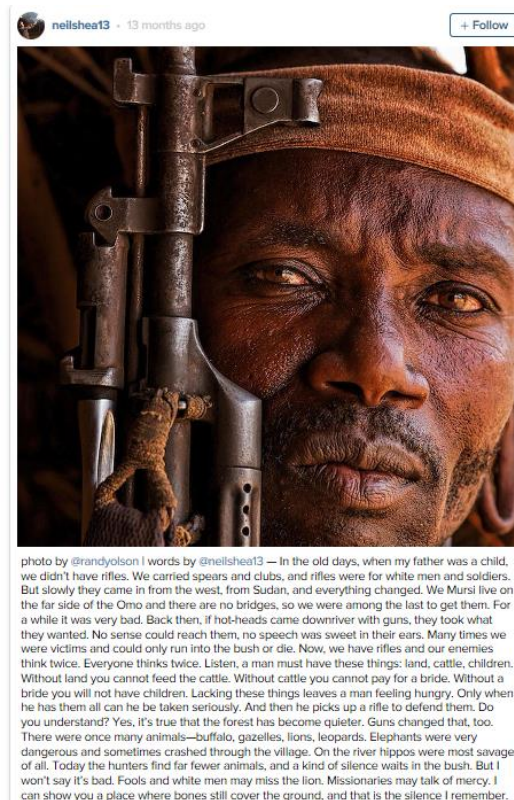


photo by @randyotson | words by @neilshea13 — In the old days, when my father was a child, we didn't have rifles. We carried spears and clubs, and rifles were for white men and soldiers. But slowly they came in from the west, from Sudan, and everything changed. We Mursi live on the far side of the Omo and there are no bridges, so we were among the last to get them. For a while it was very bad. Back then, if hot-heads came downriver with guns, they took what they wanted. No sense could reach them, no speech was sweet in their ears. Many times we were victims and could only run into the bush or die. Now, we have rifles and our enemies think twice. Everyone thinks twice. Listen, a man must have these things: land, cattle, children. Without land you cannot feed the cattle. Without cattle you cannot pay for a bride. Without a bride you will not have children. Lacking these things leaves a man feeling hungry. Only when he has them all can he be taken seriously. And then he picks up a rifle to defend them. Do you understand? Yes, it's true that the forest has become quieter. Guns changed that, too. There were once many animals—buffalo, gazelles, lions, leopards. Elephants were very dangerous and sometimes crashed through the village. On the river hippos were most savage of all. Today the hunters find far fewer animals, and a kind of silence waits in the bush. But I won't say it's bad. Fools and white men may miss the lion. Missionaries may talk of mercy. I can show you a place where bones still cover the ground, and that is the silence I remember.

Thankfully, we don't face these threats in our country (although this appears to be worsening), so we have little to compare. I can't begin to fathom what it would be like to live like this. Statistically speaking, I'm more likely to perish as the result of getting into a car wreck on the way to my workplace than meet my end by violent crime or the local wildlife. We are fortunate in that when our lives need to be protected by force, it is an anomaly, not the norm. We have access to firearms like few other places in the world, although they tend to sit in gun safes most of the time. So, it is difficult to look at this post and say anything other than, "Wow...I'm glad I don't live there!" Nonetheless, having an "edge" that sets one apart is always a desirable thing to have.

There are a plethora of valid arguments about firearms and self-defense from many different viewpoints – I will diverge from that debate at this point. I think that the more relevant fact is that a rifle is just an object of steel, plastic, or wood. It is empty of the ability to protect oneself whenever it is isolated from someone with the skill and intent to use it properly for the right reasons. In our country, a firearm is relegated to be less of a necessary "edge" and more of a tool. However, guns sitting idly in the safe protect the homestead about as well as an unused leaf-blower keeps the lawn clean. In the absence of training, these tools become even less effective than their potential. In some cases, they can pose risks due to carelessness. Discipline, skill, and intent become the real "edge" in our environment, and these are things that can be easily applied to life outside of conflict. When I look at myself, I think that the biggest barriers to developing any of these ideals come from complacency and apathy. Many times it is too easy to go through the motions rather than train in earnest. These are the lions and bandits in my life, which slowly steal away my time.

Fortunately, I have access to a great "edge" in the Gi Yu Dojo. I have teachers and fellow students who are willing to challenge me and to point out when my techniques aren't good enough to work in a real life situation. There are fellow black belts that provide feedback when I'm not reaching my potential. I get the opportunity to teach our Koryu arts to children, seeing them grow at a scary pace. I also get pushed by teachers to do things that I really don't want, like writing articles, for instance. All of this can be frustrating and rewarding at the same time, and it pushes me towards better awareness of myself and my capabilities.



A few months ago, I had the opportunity to test for Nidan. This is probably the first time that I went through testing feeling less than 100% ready, despite having spent a significant amount of time in preparation. While I had plenty of work-related chaos that distracted me this year, I can honestly say that I didn't always use my time efficiently when I did have the opportunity to train. Whenever I had to miss a class due to another commitment, I should've returned to training with the attitude to recover what I had missed. The self-imposed standards also increase significantly between shodan and nidan – this seems to be disconcerting when you are attempting to evaluate your own progress. I decided to test regardless, since life frequently doesn't wait until you're ready to impose its challenges. During the test, I noticed things that were simple seemed difficult to pull off, while the difficult things seemed to happen with less effort. This

probably reflects that I put a higher level of focus on the difficult things. While I did pass the challenge and reached the next rank, I have quite a few things to improve based on the feedback I received. While talking with one of my fellow Nidan, we both decided that although we could have performed better, there will always be another level of detail to master on these techniques. One of the more senior black belts then reminded us that achieving a rank only qualifies you to start learning the techniques.

Regardless of the outcome, it is this array of experiences that I carry with me when I try to address the challenges of everyday life. Figuratively, this would be my “rifle” which I need for everyday carry.

